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Article

Toward Data-Driven and AI-Assisted Youth Governance: Assessing the Policy-Making and Implementation Capacities of Youth Officials

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Abstract: This study assessed the policy-making skills and policy implementation strategies of Youth Officials in Tabuk City, Kalinga, identified the challenges they encounter, and examined the potential role of AI-assisted and data-driven technologies in supporting youth governance. Using a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design, data were gathered from 395 SK members, 120 Barangay Officials, and 215 SK Officials through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Findings showed that Youth Officials generally demonstrated positive policy-making skills, with an overall weighted mean of 3.47, particularly in legal knowledge, critical thinking, and prioritization. However, lower assessments were noted in data gathering, inclusivity, communication, and monitoring of policy outcomes. Policy implementation obtained an overall weighted mean of 3.33, with legal compliance and collaboration as relative strengths, while community engagement, feedback collection, adaptability, and team leadership required further improvement. The major challenges identified were limited authority and influence, resource constraints, limited time, difficulty mobilizing youth participation, limited experience and training, and community trust-building. Responses regarding technology further indicated that AI-assisted and data-driven technologies may support data management, policy and program monitoring, feedback processing, community engagement, resource organization, and administrative tasks. These findings suggest that the integration of appropriate digital and AI-assisted tools may complement existing governance practices by strengthening evidence-informed and responsive policy-making and implementation. However, such technologies should remain supportive mechanisms and be used alongside human judgment, accountability, community participation, and applicable legal and institutional requirements..

Keywords: artificial intelligence; data-driven governance; youth governance; policy-making; policy implementation

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Youth participation in governance is a fundamental component of democratic development because it enables young people to contribute to public decision-making, represent community interests, and participate in the design and implementation of programs that affect their sector. In the Philippines, this participation is institutionalized through the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK), which provides young leaders with a formal mechanism for representation and involvement in local governance. Beyond organizing youth activities, SK officials are expected to formulate policies, develop programs, manage resources, coordinate with stakeholders, and contribute to community development.

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The institutional role of the SK has been strengthened through the Local Government Code of 1991 (Republic Act No. 7160) and the Sangguniang Kabataan Reform Act of 2015 (Republic Act No. 10742), which expanded the governance responsibilities of Youth Officials to include planning, budgeting, policy formulation, implementation, and monitoring. As a result, effective youth governance increasingly depends not only on legal authority but also on the leadership, analytical, and administrative competencies of young public officials.

The significance of youth participation is likewise reflected in the Philippine Youth Development Plan 2023–2028 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16, both of which emphasize the importance of inclusive, accountable, and responsive institutions. These policy directions recognize young people as active partners in governance rather than passive beneficiaries of government programs. Consequently, strengthening the governance capacity of Youth Officials contributes directly to more participatory and responsive local governance.

Policy-making in contemporary local government requires more than identifying community problems. It involves analyzing issues, gathering reliable information, establishing priorities, communicating policy alternatives, allocating resources, and evaluating policy outcomes. Similarly, policy implementation requires planning, stakeholder coordination, monitoring, adaptability, and continuous community engagement. These competencies are particularly important for Youth Officials because their decisions directly influence youth-oriented programs and community development initiatives.

Meaningful participation remains central to effective governance. Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation explains that genuine public participation extends beyond symbolic consultation toward meaningful influence in decision-making [1]. Within youth governance, this perspective suggests that the effectiveness of the SK should be evaluated not only by its institutional existence but also by its ability to engage constituents, incorporate community feedback, and translate youth concerns into responsive policies.

The development of these governance competencies can also be understood through Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes that knowledge and leadership skills develop through interaction among experience, observation, and social environments [2]. Youth Officials therefore strengthen their governance capacities through collaboration with barangay officials, community stakeholders, mentors, and fellow youth leaders. Likewise, Empowerment Theory argues that effective leadership depends not only on individual competence but also on access to resources, participation, and the ability to influence institutional conditions [3]. These perspectives highlight that governance performance is shaped by both personal capability and organizational support.

An increasingly important dimension of public governance is the ability to collect, organize, and utilize reliable information. Decisions concerning community priorities, resource allocation, and program implementation are more effective when supported by systematic evidence rather than informal observation alone. Recent research on municipal governance demonstrates that data-driven decision-making requires public officials to combine traditional governance competencies with data-related analytical skills [4]. For Youth Officials, this capability is particularly relevant because their responsibilities involve identifying youth needs, prioritizing programs, monitoring implementation, and evaluating community outcomes.

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has further transformed how governments interact with citizens and manage public information. Digital consultation platforms, online surveys, electronic feedback systems, and social media provide additional mechanisms for citizen participation and collaborative governance. Rather than serving solely as tools for electronic service delivery, digital technologies increasingly function as platforms that strengthen transparency, responsiveness, and public engagement [5]. Within youth governance, these technologies offer practical opportunities to expand participation among young constituents who may not regularly engage in traditional community assemblies.

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has likewise introduced new possibilities for supporting information management and administrative decision-making in the public sector. AI-assisted applications can facilitate data organization, summarize large volumes of community feedback, identify recurring governance

concerns, monitor implementation progress, and support routine administrative tasks. Studies on public-sector AI emphasize that these technologies should enhance organizational efficiency while remaining subject to transparency, accountability, and ethical governance [6], [7]. Similarly, recent work on AI accountability argues that automated systems should function as decision-support tools rather than substitutes for public officials, particularly in decisions involving public resources and community interests [8].

Despite these developments, the practical adoption of AI and data-driven technologies in local governance remains uneven, particularly in developing-country contexts where institutional readiness, technical capacity, and resource availability vary considerably. For Youth Officials, the most valuable applications of these technologies are not highly technical automation systems but practical tools that improve information management, monitoring, consultation, documentation, and administrative efficiency. Such applications can strengthen evidence-informed governance without diminishing the importance of human judgment and participatory decision-making.

Previous studies on the Sangguniang Kabataan have primarily examined youth participation, leadership, and institutional challenges. However, limited attention has been given to examining the policy-making and policy implementation capacities of Youth Officials together with the potential contribution of AI-assisted and data-driven technologies in addressing identified governance gaps. Understanding these dimensions is important for developing capacity-building initiatives and identifying appropriate technology-supported approaches that respond to the actual needs and constraints of Youth Officials.

Accordingly, this study explores the policy-making and policy implementation capacities of Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Officials in Tabuk City, Kalinga. Specifically, it aims to: (1) assess the policy-making skills of SK Officials; (2) determine their knowledge of policy implementation strategies; (3) identify the challenges they encounter in policy-making and policy implementation; and (4) identify potential applications of AI-assisted and data-driven technologies that may support policy-making and policy implementation. By examining these dimensions together, the study seeks to provide an evidence-based understanding of the governance capacities of Youth Officials and the areas in which digital and AI-assisted technologies may provide complementary support. The study does not position AI as a replacement for Youth Officials but considers its potential role in strengthening information management, monitoring, feedback processing, community engagement, and routine administrative activities while retaining human judgment, accountability, and participation as essential elements of governance.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

The study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase assessed the policy-making skills and policy implementation strategies of Youth Officials, while the subsequent qualitative phase explored the challenges encountered in performing these responsibilities.

2.2 Participants

The study involved 730 participants from the 43 barangays of Tabuk City, Kalinga, consisting of 395 SK members, 120 Barangay Officials, and 215 SK Officials. The SK members were selected using Slovin's formula, Barangay Officials through convenience sampling, and SK Officials through purposive sampling.

Table 1. Profile of Participants

Participant Group	**n**	**%**
SK Officials	215	29.45
SK Members	395	54.11
Barangay Officials	120	16.44
Total	**730**	**100.00**

2.3 Research Instruments

A structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide were used. The questionnaire assessed policy-making skills, policy implementation strategies, and potential applications of AI-assisted and data-driven technologies. A five-point Likert scale was used for the quantitative items. The instruments underwent expert validation and pre-testing before data collection.

2.4 Data Collection

Permission was secured from the concerned local authorities before data collection. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. The questionnaire was administered first, followed by semi-structured interviews with selected SK Officials. Responses were subsequently organized, anonymized, and prepared for analysis.

2.5 Data Analysis

Weighted means and rankings were used to analyze the quantitative assessments. Interview responses were analyzed thematically, with frequency counts and rankings used to identify commonly reported challenges. Responses concerning potential AI-assisted and data-driven applications were likewise grouped thematically according to identified areas of support.

2.6 Scope

The study focused on current SK Officials in the 43 barangays of Tabuk City, Kalinga. It assessed their existing competencies and challenges and did not implement a training intervention or develop and test an AI-based system. Thus, the technology-related findings represent potential applications, not tested technological outcomes.

This version is preferable for your paper because it is compact, transparent, and sufficient to reproduce the basic research process without making the methodology unnecessarily long.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Policy-Making Skills of SK Officials

Table 2 shows the assessment of the policy-making skills of SK Officials based on the responses of SK members and Barangay Officials (n = 515). The overall weighted mean of 3.47 (Much Agree) indicates a generally positive assessment of their policy-making capacity. However, the results show differences across specific competencies.

Table 2. Assessment of the Policy-Making Skills of SK Officials (n = 515)

No.	Policy-Making Indicator	Mean	Level	Rank
1	Critical analysis of barangay issues and identification of root causes	3.67	Much Agree	2
2	Understanding of policy formulation steps and frameworks	3.63	Much Agree	3
3	Collection of essential data and use of credible sources	3.31	Moderately Agree	8
4	Adequate training on legal guidelines governing SK operations	3.78	Much Agree	1
5	Clear communication of policy ideas and active listening to community input	3.34	Moderately Agree	7
6	Ensuring fairness, inclusivity, and community benefit	3.29	Moderately Agree	9
7	Setting clear objectives and considering long-term policy impacts	3.36	Moderately Agree	6
8	Prioritizing urgent initiatives and managing time efficiently	3.62	Much Agree	4

9	Assessing available funds and allocating them appropriately	3.46	Much Agree	5
10	Monitoring policy results and making feedback-based adjustments	3.27	Moderately Agree	10
	Overall Weighted Mean	3.47	Much Agree	

Note. Much Agree = MA; Moderately Agree = MoA.

The highest-rated competency was knowledge of legal guidelines (M = 3.78), followed by critical analysis of issues (M = 3.67) and understanding of policy formulation (M = 3.63). These results indicate that SK Officials were perceived to have relatively strong foundational competencies in the formal and analytical aspects of policy-making. Legal knowledge is particularly important in ensuring that policy decisions remain within established governance requirements [9].

In contrast, the lowest ratings were for monitoring policy results and making adjustments based on feedback (M = 3.27), policy fairness and inclusivity (M = 3.29), and data gathering and use of credible sources (M = 3.31). These findings indicate specific areas for capacity development. The lower rating for data use is particularly relevant to data-driven governance because effective evidence-informed decision-making requires public officials to combine governance competencies with the ability to appropriately use information and data [4].

The results also show an important distinction between identifying problems and systematically using evidence to address them. Although critical issue analysis received a relatively high rating, data gathering received a comparatively lower rating. Strengthening data collection and evidence-use practices may therefore complement the existing analytical competencies of SK Officials.

3.2 Policy Implementation Strategies

Table 3 presents the assessment of policy implementation strategies. The overall weighted mean of **3.33 (Moderately Agree)** indicates that implementation practices were generally viewed as adequate but with identifiable areas for improvement.

Table 3. Assessment of the Policy Implementation Strategies of SK Officials (*n* = 515)

No.	Policy Implementation Indicator	Mean	Level	Rank
1	Creating detailed implementation plans with steps, timelines, and resources	3.38	Moderately Agree	4
2	Managing financial, human, and material resources effectively	3.40	Moderately Agree	3
3	Collaborating with community members, officials, and organizations	3.57	Moderately Agree	2
4	Monitoring policy progress and evaluating objectives	3.36	Moderately Agree	5
5	Identifying problems and adapting strategies when challenges arise	3.24	Moderately Agree	7
6	Keeping the community and stakeholders informed	3.32	Moderately Agree	6
7	Guiding and motivating teams	3.09	Moderately Agree	9
8	Ensuring legal compliance and accountability	3.58	Much Agree	1
9	Engaging the community and encouraging participation	3.05	Moderately Agree	10
10	Gathering feedback and assessing policy impact	3.18	Moderately Agree	8
	Overall Weighted Mean	**3.33**	**Moderately Agree**	

The strongest implementation strategies were legal compliance and accountability (M = 3.58) and stakeholder collaboration (M = 3.57). These findings are consistent with the relatively strong assessment of legal knowledge and indicate that compliance and collaboration are important strengths of the SK Officials assessed in the study. Collaborative governance literature similarly emphasizes the importance of stakeholder involvement in implementing public initiatives [17].

The lowest ratings were recorded for community engagement (M = 3.05), team leadership (M = 3.09), and feedback and impact assessment (M = 3.18). These results suggest that implementation capacity could be strengthened particularly in participation, leadership, and feedback mechanisms. The low rating for community engagement is also consistent with the study's qualitative findings concerning difficulty in mobilizing youth participation.

3.3 Challenges Encountered by SK Officials

Table 4 presents the challenges identified by SK Officials. Limited authority and influence was the most frequently reported challenge, followed by resource constraints and balancing responsibilities with limited time.

Table 4. Challenges Encountered by SK Officials in Policy-Making and Policy Implementation

Rank	Challenge	No. of Responses
1	Limited authority and influence	203
2	Resource constraints	186
3	Balancing responsibilities with limited time	175
4	Difficulty engaging or mobilizing youth participation	170
5	Limited experience and training	154
6	Community engagement and trust-building	118

The prominence of limited authority and influence (203 responses) indicates that institutional conditions are an important constraint on youth governance. This finding supports the view that governance effectiveness depends not only on individual competence but also on the institutional environment and opportunities to exercise influence [3].

Resource constraints (186) were the second most frequently reported challenge. This finding should be distinguished from the relatively positive assessment of resource allocation in Table 2. The results indicate that SK Officials may be capable of managing available resources while still experiencing limitations in the amount of resources available.

The remaining challenges—limited time, difficulty mobilizing youth, limited experience and training, and trust-building—further demonstrate that youth governance involves both capacity-related and institutional challenges. Importantly, these challenges cannot all be addressed through technology.

3.4 Potential Applications of AI-Assisted and Data-Driven Technologies

Table 5 maps the identified governance gaps to potential applications of AI-assisted and data-driven technologies. These applications were derived from the areas identified in the study and should be understood as potential support mechanisms, not tested technological interventions.

Table 5. Potential Applications of AI-Assisted and Data-Driven Technologies in Youth Governance

Identified Area for Improvement	Potential Technology-Supported Application
Data gathering and use of credible information	Digital data collection, information organization, survey and consultation summarization
Monitoring policy results	Digital dashboards, progress tracking, accomplishment summaries

Monitoring implementation progress	Electronic tracking of activities, timelines, targets, beneficiaries, and status
Adapting strategies to implementation challenges	Data-supported review of implementation problems and possible adjustments
Community engagement	Online consultations, digital surveys, feedback and participation platforms
Feedback and policy impact assessment	Electronic feedback collection and AI-assisted categorization or summarization
Resource constraints	Digital resource tracking, activity planning, and documentation
Limited time and competing responsibilities	AI-assisted summaries, meeting-note organization, report consolidation, and scheduling
Difficulty mobilizing youth participation	Digital communication, online engagement, surveys, announcements, and feedback channels

The strongest basis for technology support comes from the lower ratings in data use, monitoring, feedback, and community engagement. For example, the data-gathering indicator received a mean of 3.31, while monitoring policy results received 3.27. These findings provide a reasonable basis for considering digital tools that can organize information and support monitoring.

Similarly, community engagement received the lowest implementation rating (M = 3.05), while feedback collection received M = 3.18. Digital consultations and electronic feedback mechanisms may therefore provide additional channels for youth participation. These technologies should complement, rather than replace, existing face-to-face engagement.

The reported challenges also show the limits of technology. Limited authority and influence cannot be solved through AI, while resource constraints require institutional and budgetary responses. Technology may instead assist with the information and administrative aspects of these challenges, such as resource tracking, documentation, scheduling, and report organization.

AI-assisted technologies should therefore be viewed as support tools. Their potential use in organizing information, summarizing feedback, and monitoring activities does not remove the responsibility of Youth Officials to verify information, consider community perspectives, and make accountable decisions. This position is consistent with the literature emphasizing governance, accountability, and human oversight in public-sector AI [6–8].

3.5 Discussion

The findings show that SK Officials possess a generally positive foundation in policy-making (M = 3.47) but demonstrate a more moderate assessment of policy implementation strategies (M = 3.33).

The principal strengths are legal knowledge and compliance, critical analysis, prioritization, and collaboration. The areas requiring greater attention are data use, monitoring, inclusivity, community engagement, feedback, adaptability, and team leadership.

The qualitative findings reinforce these areas while identifying broader institutional challenges, particularly limited authority, resource constraints, competing responsibilities, and difficulty mobilizing youth participation. The potential technology applications identified in Table 5 are therefore best understood as complementary support for specific information and administrative needs, rather than as solutions to all governance challenges.

Overall, the findings support a needs-based and responsible approach to AI-assisted and data-driven youth governance, in which technology complements—not replaces—human judgment, participation, accountability, and institutional responsibility.

4. CONCLUSION

This study assessed the policy-making skills and policy implementation strategies of Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Officials in Tabuk City, Kalinga, identified the challenges they encounter, and examined potential applications of AI-assisted and data-driven technologies in youth governance. The findings indicate that SK Officials were generally perceived to have adequate policy-making skills, particularly in legal knowledge, critical issue analysis, policy formulation, and prioritization. However, comparatively lower ratings were observed in data gathering and the use of credible sources, policy inclusivity, communication, and monitoring and feedback-based policy adjustment.

Policy implementation strategies were assessed at a moderate level. Legal compliance and accountability and stakeholder collaboration emerged as relative strengths, while community engagement, team leadership, feedback collection, and adaptability were among the areas requiring further improvement. These findings indicate that strengthening youth governance requires continued development of competencies that support participation, monitoring, communication, and evidence-informed decision-making.

The study also identified limited authority and influence, resource constraints, competing responsibilities, difficulty mobilizing youth participation, and limited experience and training as major challenges encountered by SK Officials. These challenges demonstrate that governance performance is influenced by both individual capacity and institutional conditions. In particular, structural concerns such as limited authority and insufficient resources cannot be addressed through technology alone.

Based on the identified areas for improvement, AI-assisted and data-driven technologies may provide complementary support for data collection and organization, policy and program monitoring, feedback processing, community engagement, resource tracking, documentation, scheduling, and selected administrative tasks. These applications should be considered as potential support mechanisms rather than established solutions, since the present study did not develop or empirically test an AI-based system.

Overall, the findings support a needs-based and responsible approach to technology-supported youth governance. Strengthening the capacity of SK Officials should remain the primary focus, while appropriate digital and AI-assisted tools may complement existing governance practices by improving access to information, monitoring, communication, and administrative processes. Any future use of such technologies should remain subject to human judgment, community participation, accountability, data privacy, and applicable legal and institutional requirements.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, capacity-building initiatives for Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) Officials should prioritize the areas in which comparatively lower assessments were observed, particularly data gathering and the use of credible sources, policy monitoring, inclusivity, communication, community engagement, feedback collection, adaptability, and team leadership. Training and development activities should focus on strengthening evidence-informed policy-making and implementation while building the practical competencies needed to translate community concerns into responsive policies and programs.

Greater attention should also be given to community engagement and feedback mechanisms. SK Officials may strengthen regular consultations, community dialogues, digital or face-to-face feedback activities, and other appropriate mechanisms that allow young constituents to express their concerns and participate in policy-related processes. Strengthening these mechanisms may complement the existing strengths of SK Officials in legal compliance, critical analysis, prioritization, and stakeholder collaboration.

The challenges identified in the study also indicate the need for stronger institutional and operational support. Local government and barangay authorities should provide appropriate assistance in addressing concerns related to limited authority and influence, resource constraints, competing responsibilities, limited experience and training, and difficulties in mobilizing youth participation. Capacity development should therefore be complemented by clear

coordination, adequate support, and an institutional environment that enables Youth Officials to perform their responsibilities effectively.

In relation to the identified governance gaps, appropriate data-driven and AI-assisted technologies may be explored as complementary tools for data collection and organization, program monitoring, feedback processing, community engagement, resource tracking, documentation, scheduling, and selected administrative tasks. Such technologies should be introduced according to actual governance needs rather than technology adoption for its own sake. They should support existing governance processes and should not replace the responsibilities of Youth Officials in deliberation, consultation, and decision-making.

Any future use of AI-assisted and data-driven technologies should also incorporate human review, verification of information, data privacy, transparency, accountability, and compliance with applicable laws and institutional requirements. The present study identifies potential applications but does not establish their effectiveness because no specific AI-based system was developed or tested. Future research may therefore examine the feasibility, usability, and effectiveness of selected technology-supported applications based on the governance needs identified in this study. Such evidence can provide a stronger basis for determining which digital or AI-assisted tools are appropriate for youth governance.

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